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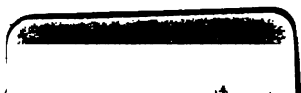
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BIRTH AND WORTH.

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BIRTH AND WORTH,

An Inquiry

INTO THE

PRACTICAL USES

OF

A PEDIGREE.



BY

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ASSOCIATE OF KING'S COLLEGE,
LONDON.



Stemmata quid faciunt, quid prodest, Pontice, longo

Sanguine censer, pictosque ostendere vultus

Majorum?

Juv. Sat. viii.



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MDCCCXLIX.



BIRTH AND WORTH.

A DISQUISITION upon pedigrees! why the very name smells mustily. The faint perfume of decayed parchment overcomes the fastidious reader. He expects to see it printed in "black letter," or in the mystical flourishings of ancient "court-hand." He throws it aside unopened,—not roughly, but daintily, lest its native dust be shaken off in a cloud, and he be compelled to sneeze—at the author.

The date perhaps meets the eye of some more practical man. But he *never had a grandfather*, and is scarcely "wise child" enough to know his paternity. Pedigrees

are therefore fictions. He washes his hands of them. They are inventions to feed the vanity of those who have nought else to be proud of. They are lying baubles, to be bought any day for a few pounds. He is too knowing to be "taken in" by any such goods. He is descended from Adam, as well as the best of you. What are pedigrees to him, or he to pedigrees?

Some wag may pounce next upon us, brimful of merry quips and cranks. He has a fat story or two about the virtue of introducing new blood to revive and perpetuate an ancient house. He is very facetious about the "bend sinister," and professes to believe only in "umbilical pedigrees." He will not forget the bumpkin who expected to see George III. with a lion and unicorn on either shoulder, as the only brachial appendages of royalty—since these were the "king's arms." He will ask you whether the crest of Bob Acres was a hand and dagger, with the motto

"Strike home," or a winged spur, inscribed "The better part of valour." He will define heraldic terms mischievously—point to the iron hooks and wooden limbs of every mutilated beggar as "arms of adoption," and show you the pickpocket, as possessing "arms of augmentation." He will ask if it be not traitor-like treatment for an armorial coat to be always drawn and quartered before it is hung—up.

Or we may meet some stern man of the world, soured by discontent, and indurated with selfishness, who perhaps knows just enough of Pope to quote his words about "the tenth transmitter of a foolish face;" and has heard of some Mr. Charles Surface knocking down his ancestors to a man named Premium. He is not very clear about these points, but he has a long catalogue of veritable spendthrifts, who have ruined their relations and their tradespeople, in spite of an old pedigree and a great rent-roll. Will an

ancient descent, he asks us, clothe the back or fill the stomach? Will an emblazoned parchment soothe the tax-gatherer, or satisfy the bailiff? That indeed would be "a new way to pay old debts." Men appear to him far more anxious to know where they come from, than whither they are going. He never saw any merit in a pedigree. Did not the noble blood of the great Dukes of Northumberland flow in the veins of Percy the trunkmaker? Did not the princely house of Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, with the blood of the Plantagenets, centre in a cobbler at Newport? What then can there be in pedigrees when to such vile uses they do come at last?

Sentiments like these are not rare; the men who indulge in them may be met with in crowds from sunrise to sunset; and if the curious observer will only visit the right locality, he will find them,—in more senses perhaps than one,—to be "every-day people." But their number is nevertheless far exceeded

by another class, who, if pressed, will half acknowledge "a sneaking kindness" for men of good descent—who never mention pedigrees, or their own fair family honours, without much hesitation, a small blush and a large apology—who store up in a dark closet, and within a tin box, some ancient roll, to moulder in solitary blessedness as a thing too selfish or shameful to be "aired;" yet they know not precisely why. These men seldom fail to cover, by an outward indifference, the real respect which they feel for ancestral honours, and are ever ready to indulge in the mock modesty of "*nolo Episcopari*." Nor does this laborious inconsistency owe its birth to a more dignified cause than a degree of indolence which is eventually more troublesome than inquiry, or a want of moral courage in boldly maintaining that which commands an inward conviction. Seldom have men condescended to ask themselves—in sober earnestness for an answer—what are the real uses and merits of a pedigree?

“The uses of a pedigree?” exclaims some bitter disputant, “Why, to crush every one who dares to be the first of his race—to taunt and mortify the gentleman of nature’s creation—to bear down and trample into his native dust that wild enthusiast who raves of intellectual nobility—to throw scoff and ridicule and foul reproach upon base commerce and her truckling arts—to give poignancy to the epithet *parvenu*—to stimulate the discourse on ‘mushroom greatness’—to shake fiercely in the face of the upstart,—that is the use of a pedigree.” Brave words, my masters! but braver still must be the man who dares to verify them in practice. “Merrie England” may be sad indeed on that day when her sons give form or colour to so foul a picture. Gone will be her power, crushed her fame, soiled her honour, when she loses respect for that noble spirit of self-dependence which peoples her marts, which directs her enterprize, which “carries civilization on the wings of com-



merce," and measures England's power by the advance of both ! That industrious self-denial which has made England rich, that vigorous self-respect which has made her free, that saucy self-reliance which has made her famous,—all will be lost, if her sons dishonour the great because they have once been humble. Genius may brighten the history of a century or an age, as distant jewels sparkle in a coronet, but from daily, hourly practical talent is formed the main fabric of a nation's fame. He who sneers at new-born greatness robs his country of a manly stimulus to independent energy ; he plunders the lowly and the poor, the orphan and the friendless, of those splendid hopes which lure them on to greatness from the very depths of misery and degradation. If any possession can attract respect, or any achievement command admiration, how much must the desert of both be enhanced by poverty overcome, difficulties

surmounted, prejudices subdued ! Far be it from these pages to depreciate the moral dignity which surrounds "the architect of his own fortunes." We may meet occasionally with a family, the increment of whose greatness has been gradual, in the long line of whose pedigree no one name stands unduly prominent, a race which, in the words of Gibbon, "is so ancient that it has no beginning, so worthy that it ought to have no end." But the majority of illustrious houses in this country owe their fame to some *single* founder, by whose genius the present generation has been ennobled, or by whose industry they have been enriched. He therefore who scorns the humble aspirant after dignity and wealth may unconsciously reproach the founder of his own race ; and from the monument of a buried ancestor the scoff of to-day may reverberate to his shame. If it be just, however, to remind the man of ancient family by such an argument, that he

has this community with every upstart, it is only fair to remember how much the *prestige* of a dignified race stimulates the very creation and career of the latter, by holding up an object of high ambition. As a summons to human exertion, the desire of fame, or the lust of wealth, may meet with ready appreciation ; but the hope of posthumous honour adds the future as an incentive to the present—ennobles that incentive by denuding it of selfishness—and extends the emulation by perpetuating the reward. To found a dynasty of his own, and to secure in the memory of a grateful posterity the record of his trials and his triumphs, is the secret hope of every man who has “achieved greatness” for himself. But to make an open acknowledgment of that ambition is usually too great a trial for his candour. As he has done much for wealth, he expects wealth to do much for him ; and he likes not to parade to the world the fact, that the chief rewards

of his ability and self-denial are reserved for his descendants. Hence does it necessarily happen that any endeavour to form a rational estimate of genealogical honours "in open court" is so indecisive ; for we can summon to such an inquiry few disinterested witnesses. In his own person almost every man is a party to the cause, and is prejudiced by the dignity or meanness of his own origin. The nobly and the ignobly born are equally to be mistrusted, lest the one should be ready to exaggerate the merits of that which he possesses, and the other to depreciate the value of what he lacks. A rare accident—but one by no means so valuable as it is rare—*may* furnish us with testimony of a direct kind ; we may chance to find a few persons who endeavour to become impartial, not by weighing but by crushing their natural prepossessions, and who seem more willing to decide wrongly against the bent of common sentiments, than rightly under the stigma of

prejudice. We may therefore succeed in discovering well-born men, in defiance of personal bias, traducing ancestral honours, and we can assuredly find "*novi homines*" reverencing antiquity. But which of these two classes are the more numerous? Experience here concurs with reason, and analogy with both. For how few scholars do we find reviling learning, compared with the number of uneducated men who revere books! How few tall men despise height, compared with the dwarfs who would add whole cubits to their stature! It is so natural for human beings to pine for that in which they are deficient, that it is not very uncharitable to attribute apparent exceptions rather to the want of frankness than the possession of magnanimity. These pages must sometimes appeal from the intemperance of a reader's prejudices to the soberer hours of his candour, but they will be far more apt to invoke the sanction of a natural impulse, than to

dwell under the shadow of a spurious impartiality.

If the belief in the virtue of a good descent were as extended as the love of wealth, the fear of death, or the hope of immortality, an argument might be drawn from its universal diffusion; on that universality might be founded a confidence, that it was originally implanted in our nature; and from both might be deduced the conclusion, that it was instituted for a wise and beneficial purpose. But the belief is *not* universal; its warmest advocates will claim for it no more than a general diffusion. That, however, which is necessarily true as regards an universal impulse, is not wholly false when applied to a general sentiment. The same reasoning is, to a limited extent, admissible. The practice of investigating the lives of our ancestors, recalling the memory of that which may be lost, and securing the record of that which is known, must owe its

existence to some *common* principle in men's minds, since it has in any shape survived the indifference of the indolent, the jealousy of the low-born, the scoff of the jester, the lofty contempt of the purse-proud, and the *mauvaise honte* of him who is half learned and whole lazy. If that common principle were, in its nature, wholly pure and dignified, it would deserve the highest admiration for its rarity ; but, if it be slightly tinged with selfishness or exaggerated by vanity, it does not merit much contempt for the adulteration, since it shares *that* blemish with the noblest impulses of imperfect humanity. It is no wild or puerile enthusiasm which makes us seem to have lived in the persons of our progenitors. That can scarcely be esteemed an unworthy tendency, the chief element of which is gratitude to the authors of our existence, and the chief manifestation of which is sympathy with the departed. A man of rightly constituted mind will not

fail to identify himself with the career of those, whose name and race form almost an integral portion of himself. In their difficulties he undergoes a struggle, in their shame he blushes, in their joy he triumphs. "It is the labour and the reward of vanity," says Gibbon, "to extend the term of this ideal longevity." Yet the demerit of that vanity must justly be comparative; its influence is not dwelt upon with greatest emphasis by the purest or most immaculate of mankind, but by those chiefly who have dearer vanities of their own to foster and indulge. None but the most indifferent observer can overlook the fact, that the chief censurers of ancestral pride are gifted with abundant self-esteem and personal conceit. The cares of to-day and the pleasures of to-morrow are allowed to monopolize every living sympathy. Our vast commercial dealings, our strides in physical science, our progress in political knowledge, impress us with

such a sense of our own importance, that the individual vanity of one generation ignores the fame of every other. With the noise of its *own* doings the whole world resounds, and the shrill piping of antiquity is swallowed up in the thunder of present pride. Meanwhile, the steady hand of time mows on cruelly, coldly, surely. Each living memory is swept away in detail ; the link of tradition and hereditary influence which bound one generation to another, is snapt asunder with the close of every life ; and those hallowed reminiscences which give dignity to age and tenderness to natural affection, are committed to the silence of the grave, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

Yet not always willingly, or "with malice aforethought," are the records of the past allowed to fade from our sight. The necessities of the hour are stern taskmasters. In the attempt to acquire wealth, men are compelled to deny themselves the exercise

of many elegant accomplishments, so that when affluence is attained, the merchant or professional man can only mourn over the traditions of bygone times. He can perhaps be little blamed, who—thinking all but the present to be a dream—suspects that if he really possessed *progenitors of any kind*, their obliteration from his memory sufficiently attests their insignificance. But never was a greater error. Far more probable is it, that those social advantages have not been his, which tend to perpetuate the memory of the past. The vigour of his course through life has effectually shut him out from the society of elder relations. The scene of his existence was not the drawing-room, the friendly circle, or the family fire-side. The amenities of social intercourse and converse with kinsmen, were probably in early life exchanged for the desk, the study, or labour in a foreign land. His very success in after life estranged him from his

kin, and made him smile at "the old world tales" of those who were poorer than himself. The mental qualifications which produced that success, were diametrically opposed to musing over the past. He was always a man of to-day, not of yesterday—always practical, never contemplative. He could not bring himself to admire ancestors who left him nothing ; nay, he could scarcely refrain from despising a set of men, who must have fought with fortune and been vanquished—for they were unknown on 'Change ; unrecorded in the courts ; powerless with the government ; a prey to dust and worms ; yet in his heart he does not venture to deny, that no coin will teach courtesy, no money will produce manner, no gold breed gentlemen. And often in the evening of life does he regret that he cannot bequeath an ancient name and an attested pedigree, along with that hard-earned wealth, for which he bartered youth, and joy, and intellect.

Those who would enumerate the merits of ancestral honours will not forget the incitement they offer to elevated aspirations and noble actions. But after all, ambition is a child of doubtful parentage — sometimes owing its birth to the difficulties by which a man is surrounded, or even the degradation to which he is exposed; sometimes to the influence of family example; sometimes to public expectation; but quite as often, puzzling the psychologists by its apparent spontaneity. Not of the latter cast however was the dawn of Warren Hastings' ambition. He sprang from an ancient and illustrious race, who were utterly ruined by the civil wars. "The daily sight," says Mr. Macaulay in his Historical Essays, "of the lands which his ancestors had possessed, and which had passed into the hands of strangers, filled his young brain with wild fancies and projects. He loved to hear stories of the wealth and greatness of his progenitors, of their splendid *housekeeping*, their loyalty, and their valour.

There rose in his mind a scheme, which through all the turns in his eventful career was never abandoned. He would recover the estate which had belonged to his fathers. He would be Hastings of Daylesford. This purpose, formed in infancy and poverty, grew stronger as his intellect expanded and his fortune rose. He pursued his plan with that calm but indomitable force of will, which was the most striking peculiarity of his character. When under a tropical sun he ruled fifty millions of Asiatics, his hopes, amidst all the cares of war, finance, and legislation, still pointed to Daylesford. And when his long public life, so singularly chequered with good and evil, with glory and obloquy, had at length closed for ever, it was to Daylesford that he retired to die. Behind the chancel of the parish church, in earth which already held the bones of many chiefs of the house of Hastings, was laid the coffin of the greatest man who has ever



borne that ancient and widely extended name. On that very spot probably, fourscore years before, the little Warren, meanly clad and scantily fed, had played with the children of ploughmen. Not only had the poor orphan retrieved the fallen fortunes of his line ; not only had he repurchased the old lands and rebuilt the old dwelling ; he had preserved and extended an empire ; he had founded a polity ; he had administered government and war with more than the capacity of Richelieu ; he had patronized learning with the judicious liberality of Cosmo ; he had been attacked by the most formidable combination of enemies that ever sought the destruction of a single victim ; and over that combination, after a struggle of ten years, he had triumphed. He had at length gone down to his grave in the fulness of age, in peace after so many troubles, in honour after so much obloquy." The stimulus of his fame he bequeathed for the guidance

of unborn generations. The vulgar rewards of power and wealth had not animated *him* to exertion ; hereditary influence was the sole incentive to his ambition, and Daylesford the loadstar of his existence. Yet how widely and industriously diffused has been the assertion, that from the lowest ranks of life have sprung all the greatest of the human race ! He who proves by argument or example, that unpropitious circumstances are no real barrier to the acquisition of wealth, that poverty is but a seeming impediment to the attainment of affluence, that a humble origin may be exchanged for the highest honours of the state, that ignorance is not bliss, nor indolence magnanimity, may justly be reckoned amongst the noblest and most practical of patriots. But a doctrine may be wholesome, as an incentive to activity and cheering as a historic truth, yet require little exaggeration or perversion to be changed into a falsehood, doubly

pestilent,—a poison to its producer and to its recipient. It is the fate of many noble and glorious efforts to be peculiarly obnoxious to this vicissitude—to be seized by the slaves of party, twisted to some vile purpose, and soiled even in their legitimate use by the profanation of their later application.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the doctrine to which we now refer has outstripped the facts upon which it was originally founded, till we are at length boldly told that low-born men are “the fruitful soil of all genius, of all imagination, of all constructiveness, of all valour, daring, enterprise, success, and national glory; that to them is due every improvement in agriculture, mechanics, manufactures, while the aristocracy are the mere vermin that ride in the lion’s mane, because they have cleverly located themselves out of the reach of his paws¹.” If such assertions were not almost

¹ *Aristocracy of England*, p. 308.

too gross to need any other refutation than that which they carry with themselves, we might refer in triumph to the records of every science, every art, every department of learning or imagination, where the gilded threads of aristocratic fellowship will be found to mingle with every sober hue, in the unity of the same fabric, which they have jointly raised, ennobled, and adorned. We might mention Boyle as a man of noble origin, who enlightened and embellished the physical sciences, even if he failed much to enrich them. We might speak of Cavendish as a man of princely affluence, and the grandson of a Duke, to whom we owe some of the greatest steps in chemical science. Bacon himself, who, whatever we may say to his politics or morals, deserves undying gratitude as the father of experimental philosophy, sprang from an honourable race, and was the eldest son of a lord keeper. A Marquis was the author of that "century of inventions,"

which each successive year attests as a miracle of scientific sagacity. To the Earl of Rosse are we indebted for some of the highest results of astronomical investigation. From a Lord Stanhope have we received many fruits of practical science, amongst which the printing press is known to every child. In the Earl of Dundonald we still possess a distinguished follower of mechanical philosophy. Fielding sprang from the Earls of Denbigh, Pope from the Earls of Downe. Spenser descended from the same stock as the great Marlborough family. Byron was a peer in his own right. Dryden was of ancient origin, from amongst the old Northamptonshire gentry, allied to an Earl, and the progenitor of a race of Baronets. Parnell represented an ancient Cheshire house, long resident at Congleton, and since ennobled under that title. Milton was the direct descendant of the ancient proprietors of Milton, in Oxfordshire ; and his father, though compelled,

by disinheritance on the score of religion, to follow the trade of a scrivener, eventually became a judge. Shenstone's ancestors held the Leasowes for many generations. Congreve, like Milton, sprang from a race so ancient, that their residence and their patronymic were identical; from the Conquest the Congreves of Congreve had been landed proprietors. Nor can we in justice omit to enumerate here the names of Waller, Drummond of Hawthornden, Lord Lyttelton, the Earl of Roscommon, Charles, Earl of Dorset, Sir Thomas Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey, and a host of others, of whom it would be difficult to say whether they received from their origin, or reflected on their race, most dignity and honour. From an ancient Kentish house Gibbon "did not blush to descend." Hume derived from a junior branch of the Earls of Home. Addison was the son of a dean. The inventor of logarithms was Laird of Merchistoun. But where can such a cata-

logue be allowed to end, if the purpose of this enumeration were direct instead of incidental, and we were willing to substitute research for current recollection? More than enough has been said without naming one distinguished naval or military commander, one great statesman or diplomatist, who might be supposed to have owed his opportunities of attaining eminence to that very nobility of extraction which is the matter of controversy.

But whether we eventually admit or deny the frequent influence of an ancient descent in prompting men to high achievements, less doubt can be entertained of its power in deterring them from base actions or unworthy enterprises. "Wherever the distinction of birth," says Gibbon, "is allowed to form a superior order in the state, education and example will often produce among them a dignity of sentiment and propriety of conduct which is guarded from dishonour by

their own and the public esteem." This negative influence, though perhaps not very patent or eminent in its individual fruits, is far from despicable in the result of their aggregation. The man who is deterred from a mean or even a questionable action by the reflection that it is unworthy of the race from which he springs, adds perceptibly to the sum of national honour. Nor does his sentiment lose any of its dignity, because the struggle is mental and the occasion private,

" The private path, the secret acts of men,
If noble, are the noblest of our lives."

No wise friend of society, who knows it to be made up of units, will sneer at any auxiliary to individual virtue. " The principle of honour," said the late Chief Justice Bushe, " in those moments of weakness when conscience slumbers, watches over the deserted charge, and engages friends in the defence

of integrity. It is a sanction of conduct which the imagination lends to virtue, is itself the reward, and inflicts shame as the punishment. The audacity of vice may despise fear, the sense of reason may be steeled ; art may elude temporal, and impiety defy eternal vengeance ; but honour holds the scourge of shame, and he is hard indeed who trembles not under its lash. Even if the publicity of shame be avoided, its sanction is not destroyed. Every one suffers when ashamed of himself, and the blushes of the soul are agony. Virtue coldly entertained in any other corner of the heart will take a strong hold in the pride of man. She has often erected her temple in the coronets of a glorious ancestry, and the world has been indebted to the manes of the dead for the merits of the living."

If all mental, like most physical, qualities obeyed the same laws of transmission from parent to offspring,—if genius, for example,

were hereditary, it would enslave the world.
But nature docks this entail :—

“ Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis :

Est in juvenis, est in equis patrum

Virtus ; nec imbellem feroces

Progenerant aquilæ columbam.”



With high genius, however, it is usually otherwise ; filial degeneracy has too often buried in impotence and ignorance the name and race of very great men, to render any research necessary for proving that the possessor of genius is usually “a tenant for life.” But the experience of mankind is unequivocal upon this point—that there *are* moral and intellectual qualities of a minor kind, which do pass from father to son with about the same degree of interruption, variety, and intermittence, which characterizes physical resemblances. Colloquial expressions, and even the slang of the many-tongued multitude, recognize both as hereditary qualities. The latter is acknowledged in the phrase, “a

family likeness," and the former is expressed in the figurative philosophy of the populace as "a chip of the old block." Every day presents us with practical examples of a belief in this doctrine by men who would ridicule it, if propounded to them in abstract terms. Thus he who becomes surety for a friend employed in a banking-house, and subsequently learns that the father of his *protégé* was hanged for forgery, will he not instinctively start at the intelligence, if his prudence carries him no further? He who is disposed towards matrimony, and learns suddenly that the object of his attentions has a blot on her maternal scutcheon, will he not hesitate and inquire? Again, what chance of employment would a Swiss valet have, if he bore the name of Courvoisier? In reality, men act more often than they suppose upon the vulgar adage,—not the less true for its coarseness,—"what is bred in the bone will not go out of the flesh;" and little wisdom

do they show who question the community in virtue while they admit the contagion of vice. Such moderate talents and tastes, such minor moralities as tend to protect property, command respect, or fortify independence, are the pregnant causes of ancient though untitled lines. It is impossible not to see that those families which from the Conquest to the present hour have preserved a dignified position in the same county or district, and have often held the same land without break or interruption, must have enjoyed in common certain intellectual qualities, must have practised in common certain virtues, and must be the living attestations of the hereditary nature of both the one and the other. Such qualities as these a man may hope to see revived in himself or in his children ; and thus does it happen that an ancient rather than an illustrious descent often brings most solid satisfaction. Men may well be proud who can address their ancestor in the words of Flaminius :—

“ Vixisti, genitor, bene ac beate,
Nec pauper, neque dives ; eruditus
Satis, et satis eloquens ; valente
Semper corpore, mente sana, amicis
Jucundus, pietate singulari ².”

In such respects the most modest of mankind may hope to imitate his ancestors, without trusting in its unlimited plenitude to the doctrine of 'Εξ ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθοί. All men may hope to emulate the *virtues* which have adorned the best of his race ; but who amongst the Shaksperes could expect to rival the genius of such a progenitor, or which of the Wellesleys will be remembered when the great Duke is forgotten ? He who springs from an ancestor of high intellectual or moral power is always exposed to the humiliating effects of a comparison ; but any man of honour who looks back upon an ancient, well-attested muster-roll of progenitors, on whose fair fame no shadow of reproach has

² Carmina Sacra Marc. Ant. Flamin.

ever found a resting-place, will enjoy a pleasure of which nothing can despoil him, into which no malice can cast a particle of alloy, which no thief can purloin, and no poverty disgrace. Nor in these natural feelings can the most obtuse or the most selfish man avoid learning some solemn lessons. His tastes and affections, nay, his very passions, cannot fail to guide him where reason or philosophy might stumble—

“——feelings that from heaven are shed
Into these tenements of flesh, ally
Themselves to earthly passions,”

for he will find no eloquence more affectionately persuasive than that which flows from old family portraits, or mouldering monuments in the neighbouring church. He can yield to no sensations more refined and affecting than those which a quiet ramble over the apartments of an ancient residence is sure to engender. Every line, every colour, every plank,—the very furniture

and the vilest dust take tongues unto themselves and speak. The struggles, the agonies that have been witnessed by four silent walls, the grief that has been chronicled in marble or in brass, the hopes that have consecrated *this* scene, the triumphs that have embalmed the memory of *that*, the piety that has knelt *here*, the consolations that have been administered *there*, that split panel on which the same sun has shone at the same hour for centuries, the present tranquillity reigning over all, and speaking with such silent eloquence of time and of eternity—how dull must be the blood which these fail to stir ; how base the soul which they do not chasten and elevate !

Yet it is difficult—and, perhaps, if it were easy it would not be very judicious—to separate pedigree from pelf in the popular mind. There, the possession of ancestors seems useful only in so far as it leads to the inheritance of wealth : and the hope, or possibility of that inheritance, is apt to be the sole

conservator of the traditions of consanguinity or affinity, which it transmits in a manner amusingly hazy and indefinite. There is scarcely a family in the kingdom of which some junior member does not nurse the notion, that, under certain contingencies, a great estate or a title in some way or other falls to his house. He will feel piqued when you press him for the exact route, the distance, the sign-posts. Or, if in very good humour, he may begin to say, "You see, the maternal grandfather of my uncle's brother-in-law,—that is to say, you know, the second cousin once removed of my grandfather's uncle by the mother's side—no, I am wrong; it was the niece by marriage of the maternal grandfather of my wife's half-sister—yes, that was it.—I am not sure, though—let me see—no—that is to say—well, I can't tell you now exactly, you know—but it's all right somehow—you see, when Mr. so-and-so dies, it must come to us." This may be an exag-

gerated picture of a popular pedigree, but we ask no man to plead guilty in his own name. Let him not be so selfish as to forget his friends. Does not he know an honest fellow or two who cherishes and coddles an absurdity of this kind into something as immaculate as his horse or his watch, when an intelligible written pedigree would, in half an hour, rid him of this traditionary muddle, which has frittered away half a lifetime in futile visions? Does not every man sometimes feel that his censorious acquaintances find it as difficult to believe the oral testimony on which rest his own beloved honours, as to swallow the pedigree of his more puzzle-pated friend. In truth, anything but a recorded, fully drawn, genealogy is "a mockery, a delusion, and a snare." Traditionary pedigrees are not committed to positive statements, like a parchment roll; there is nothing tangible, nothing capable of contradiction or disproof, and therefore nothing worthy of implicit belief.

All is hazy, general, loose ; and the obscurity lends no enchantment to the view ; an ancestor looms nothing the bigger from out of a cloud ; the *ignotum* of a pedigree is not accepted *pro magnifico*—quite the reverse. No man can speak, or even think, with boldness of his origin, if he does not feel himself backed by the actual possession of satisfactory evidence. The tradition gets battered in its passage from hand to hand ; is tinged by the sanguine colouring of successive imaginations ; is soiled, or added to, or warped, like every other statement which is destitute of documentary proof, according to the tone of the age, or the temper of each generation. It is not easy to imagine how any well-born man can be so indifferent to his good fortune as to commit to these frail and foul custodians the memory of his origin,—

“When it deserves, with characters of brass,
A fortified residence 'gainst the tooth of time
And razure of oblivion.”

In this detractive world it is well worth while to *seem* as well as to *be* honest, for every object of public esteem is exposed to the risk of a counterfeit, and none more so than pedigrees. Youth may be personated by age, wealth may be aped by poverty, honesty may be assumed, charity mimicked, learning forged, modesty mocked, every great or good quality may have, in the slang of Bow-street, its "smasher" with base coin,—but what are they all, compared to apocryphal pedigrees? This, however, is at once the penalty and the attestation of eminence. "There would be no counterfeits," says Tillotson, "but for the sake of something real; Bristol stones would not pretend to be diamonds, if there never had been diamonds." So the merits of a creditable origin have captivated men of more imagination than morality, and seduced them to elope into the happy realms of fiction. The recovery of an estate or heritable title is not always the tangible prize

which has allured the impostor, but quite as frequently the ambition to share in that instinctive respect which birth commands in every nation. It is related of Bandinelli, the Italian sculptor, that he was a man of mean extraction, but having acquired great wealth and titular honours from the Emperor Charles V., he repeatedly changed his name to hide his origin, and fixed last upon that by which he is generally known, in order that he might seem to have sprung from the noble house of the Bandinelli of Sienna. The celebrated Spanish dramatist, Lope de Vega, is accused of having indulged a similar anxiety for a noble descent. It is recorded of one of the greatest scholars and critics of the sixteenth century, the elder Scaliger, that he took the trouble of composing an elaborate memoir of his own life, in which he pretended to be the last surviving descendant of the princely house of La Scala of Verona, and consequently the lineal heir of that sove-

reignty, which, having been sometime previously conquered by the Venetians, had been incorporated by them with their territory. In order to support this story he went the length of inventing a series of adventures which he said had befallen him, and gave out that having been preserved by his mother from the general persecution of his race, he was carefully educated, and eventually presented at the court of the Emperor Maximilian, who made him one of his pages. He added that he subsequently distinguished himself greatly; first in the wars of Italy, then in the service of France, till after a succession of other fortunes and misfortunes, he was induced by the solicitation of La Rovère, Bishop of Agen, to accompany that prelate to his episcopal seat, and thus at last to terminate his vain endeavours to recover his lost principality. Now the truth is, as has been since abundantly proved, that Scalliger's real name was Bordoni; that he was,

in all probability, the son of a miniature painter, who resided at Padua, and that he never even assumed the name of Scaliger till he was well advanced in life, having borne it only in conjunction with his own in his forty-fourth year, when he obtained letters of naturalization in France, which are still extant ³."

"Vain as false greatness is, the Muse must own
We want not fools to buy that Bristol stone,
Mean sons of earth, who, on a South-sea tide
Of full success, swam into wealth and pride."

But let us not dwell longer on the history of forgers to the discredit of honest men. The good housewife who hears much of base coin is apt to throw a slur upon the soundest metal, and he who is troubled with tales of robbers, is wont to see a thief in every face.

Amongst the evil consequences of an indif-

³ Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties, vol. i. p. 39.

ference to the preservation of pedigrees, must be reckoned the loss of many peerages to their rightful owners, and this in more ways than seem probable at first view. Every one understands how such a calamity may happen to some direct descendant in the male line of a noble house, who, on account of springing from a junior branch, has had little hope of inheritance, and has allowed the memory of his origin to die of contempt, or to degenerate into a barren tradition. Such cases are very few in number, and bear only a fractional proportion to others more deserving of mention. It is not too much to say that the genealogist must be passing bold, who will predicate of any family, without long and laborious investigation, that its present representative might not be a rightful peer of the realm. Few men really know "the fame that slumbers in their fathers' tomb," however ready they may be to assert, that if any ancestor of theirs had been a peer, it is im-

possible but that they must have received some tradition of the fact. It is not so. There are at this hour upwards of 200 peerages of England, Ireland, and Scotland, either in abeyance or dormant, the vast majority of which are in that condition from a neglect of pedigrees among untitled persons. When a barony was created by writ of summons, it became heritable by a peer's daughter, on the failure of his male issue; and she by marriage was capable of carrying the title with her into her husband's family; from which it might again pass by the marriage of heirs female into a third, fourth, or fifth house, the name and history of which now bear no immediate indication of noble birth. Where the peer had an *only* daughter, the title has always so passed, and has sometimes traversed a dozen houses in descending to its holder at the present day. But when the ennobled person had two daughters instead of one, the dignity re-

mained in abeyance between them both, and was not the exclusive property of either. They have perhaps both married and each carried into the family of her husband this coheirship, which, from the birth of numerous children, bore no prospect of centering in an individual, and was, after three or four generations, lost sight of as a contingent honour. Yet it has happened far more frequently than is generally imagined, that the descendants of one daughter have eventually died out, while the blood of the other, after passing through half a dozen heirs female, has entered as many families, the last of which is wholly unaware of its good fortune. The head of that house is a peer of the realm, and knows it not. But how much more complex does the case become, when the noble ancestor happens to have had half a dozen daughters as coheirs, who have married, say Tomkins and Jenkins, Smith, Brown, Jones, and Robinson ; and when these

also have begotten children in every variety of number and both varieties of sex ! Yet if the blood of *five* of these, after some two or three hundred years, becomes extinct, the blood of the *sixth*, which passed into the family of Robinson, may have centered in a succession of only children, daughters married into nine or ten families, different at each generation ; who can then venture to foretell the name of the present peer ? Yet that peer is a living man deprived of his rights, because some forty people perhaps have neglected their pedigrees, or sent him no notice that they were about to die without issue. Modern diligence and learning may sometimes succeed in repairing the error ; but does that palliate the consequences of failure, which is often inevitable, or justify the original neglect, which is always inexcusable ?

The munificence, the piety, and the educational zeal of bye-gone days, have left for

the enjoyment and imitation of these times many noble endowments, in which a preference is reserved for the "founder's kin." Moreover a man, derived from blood-royal—related to any sovereign of England by consanguinity or affinity, provided he possess the courtesy title of Honourable (or is the eldest son of a person so styled) can take an University degree a year earlier in right of his birth. Our Universities abound with fellowships and scholarships—our charitable institutions like Morden College, Dulwich College, Heriot's Hospital, and similar monuments of ancestral piety, have the offices of chaplain, treasurer, warden, master, &c., all filled by the founder's kin, and the aid of the endowment itself extended to such relations in preference to strangers. Nor is this privilege confined to persons who stand in a position of lineal consanguinity, and who, of course, are more likely than any other to have a knowledge

of their birthrights ; but is equally extended to collateral kindred, whether derived through male or through female lines. Provided a man draws his blood from the same stock as the founder, it is not always essential that he shall be of the same name or race. Whoever doubts the possibility of his own relationship in this degree to any founder of a fellowship, scholarship, or charitable institution, can have exercised very little reflection on the nature of consanguinity. Every man has two parents, four grandparents, eight in the next ascending degree (namely, the parents of his two grandfathers and his two grandmothers), sixteen in the next, and so on in geometrical progression, till by an ascent of twenty generations, it is demonstrable in common arithmetic, that we each have upwards of a million of ancestors. Now, who will venture to say without investigation, that out of this million no one person was a collegiate

or charitable founder. It would be a mistake moreover to draw the conclusion, that by the very number of persons who stand in this position the privilege is rendered useless, because those only who can *prove* their descent have any prospect of enjoying the advantages of their origin—those only who can *show* that they are

“ — evenly derived

From their most fam'd of famous ancestors.”

For too often supineness allows the way to be choked up—that which might have been cleared away any day in the year has not been done at all—“the fatal precedent” has been decisive, and “the thief of time” triumphant, until with the vast majority of persons it becomes

“ — a sinister and awkward claim,

Pick'd from the worm-holes of long-vanish'd days,

And from the dust of old oblivion rak'd.”

Gibbon tells us how a collateral relative

of his own, a herald by profession and inclination, found singular gratification at a war-dance of some North American Indians, in contemplating their measured steps, their brandished tomahawks, their shields of bark, and naked bodies, painted with the colours and symbols of his favourite science; and how he extracted thence the reflection that heraldry was grafted naturally into the human race! We can afford to smile at this exercise of a warm imagination, when it is spent in "naturalizing" an institution so notoriously artificial in its origin. But we need not immediately rush into the opposite extreme of despising by analogy every other legitimate proof of a sound structure, which happens to be incidentally derived from the breadth and depth of its foundations. We are ready enough to sneer at the arts, the philosophy, or the commerce of those whom we choose to style barbarous, yet we do not always disdain in arguing the holiest of subjects to

prove our case "by saint, by *savage*, and by sage." Those only, therefore, who acknowledge no gratitude to antiquity, no duty to posterity, will despise a passing illustration derived from the exaggerated practices of the most ancient of living empires. In China, it is well known, that divine honours are actually paid to ancestors, and the chief families preserve with scrupulous fidelity their records, which they regard as the most precious part of the inheritance that descends from sire to son. For more than two thousand years have the posterity of Confucius enjoyed the privileges and respect, which have sprung from the perpetual preservation of their origin by a sentiment grafted on the national creed. In a discourse which one of their kings had with Confucius, happening to touch upon the customs of high antiquity, the former inquired, why the ancient Emperors, in their sacrifices, had connected ancestors with the Supreme

Being? The answer of the philosopher is pertinent. "The Supreme Being" said he, "is the universal principle and prolific source of all things; our ancestors, who sprang from this source, are themselves the source of succeeding generations. It was to inculcate at the same time this double obligation, that the rites in honour of heaven and of ancestors were established, which require, immediately after sacrificing to the Supreme Being, homage should be rendered to our progenitors⁴." Nor can we deny this to be a most natural impulse amongst a primitive race,—after offering to the highest source of all, thanks for the blessings of existence, to turn next with gratitude towards those by whom the blessings have been transmitted to themselves.

No man who has attained to any decent competence fails to use the heraldic ensigns of his family; and some are content to seal

⁴ Thornton's History of China, vol. i. p. 181.

their letters, decorate the covers of their books, mark their plate, and paint their carriages, with the arms and crest which an engraver's shopman has found for them. But how few persons are aware that the condition of their pedigree may render the whole a gross absurdity! How few know that the possession or the want of a maternal uncle may be a vital point; that the existence or absence of a brother-in-law, the priority of birth, and a thousand other circumstances, if unascertained, may render the whole a heraldic falsehood! We have little hope of seeing heraldry made very popular; the griffins and dragons of that science are rather indigestible monsters. "Nursery Rhymes on the Greek Particles," or "Peter Parley's Tales about the Integral Calculus," are more probable publications than a successful work on Popular Heraldry. But it is a provoking thing, to see men of sense and education, right good fellows in their own way, who

can drive a bargain even with a Jew, who have memory enough to tell you the price of Exchequer bills for every day in the last three months, who have city science enough to see other than zoological differences between a bull, a bear, and a stag, yet unable to comprehend the gay decorations of their own Exchange, their own Castle at Windsor, their own Houses of Parliament—nay, their own brougham, barouche, or britschka. They will use a “book ticket” almost without knowing the top from the bottom. They will criticise the chasing of a seal, admire amethyst, cornelian, or blood-stone, pay ten guineas for engraving it—perhaps boast of that expenditure, like a noble earl that we wot of—but without having the remotest idea that they may have perpetrated and perpetuated an absurdity, that they may have unsexed themselves, committed heraldic bigamy, or some other enormity, for the amusement of the initiated. No engraver,

no book, no herald, can tell them what is right or what is wrong, until the condition of their pedigree has been investigated, the nature of their alliances examined, their own fraternal position, and a myriad of other questions, clearly settled. Nor if they enter on such an inquiry will they find it so barren of pleasure as it seems at first. There will be found a triumph for every toil, and a gratification for every grievance. To collect the elements of a genealogy from an assemblage of heterogeneous authorities, to organize the incoherent remnants of antiquity, to invest the skeleton which we have recalled from the tomb with the attributes of life, and to adorn the current of successive generations with attempts at illustrative biography, has all the dignity of rescuing truth from oblivion, and all the self-rewarding pleasure for which veracity is famed.

Amongst the practical requitals which stimulate the flagging energy of the gene-

alogist, is the unexpected discovery of an heiress in a pedigree, whose existence had escaped the scrutiny of his predecessors in the same inquiry. No fortune-hunter can equal the genuine herald in the avidity with which he pounces on an heiress ; the diligence with which he brings every minute occurrence, every shadowy inference or conjecture to bear upon the object of his pursuit. In coin or in acres, in possession or expectancy, does the fortune-hunter basely count his gains ; but the genealogist luxuriates over "the pomp and circumstance" of a new armorial quartering—the produce of some ancient escutcheon, cleared from the oblivion of rolling centuries, raked up from the dust and obscurity of successive generations, renovated and permanently implanted amid the heraldic insignia of his house, where it can neither be dissipated by spendthrifts, nor destroyed by fraud, nor sold for money. Romantic incidents start up in the pursuit of

truth, proverbially stranger than fiction. The memories of aged relatives are brought from the repose of nearly a century to pour forth a flood of fact, and anecdote, and adventure,—the grey stones which, stained and moss-grown, now mourn the loss of “Old Mortality,” are inspected with a solicitude sufficient to melt the heart of any less obdurate material,—the dusty receptacles of family papers are routed out, to the manifest derangement of the domestic economy of rats and spiders,—old letters are restored to light which breathe the hopes or fears of a departed generation, and unite us to those whom we had never seen, by the community of our natural affections,—parish registers are searched, those pithy annals of human happiness and grief,

“—where to be born, or die,
Of rich or poor makes all the history,”—

testamentary documents are perused with

anathemas on the long-windedness of lawyers,—and a reluctant commendation of their precision, when our hopes of discovery chance to be gratified,—public records are disturbed from their slumbers in the Tower of London, or the Chapter-house at Westminster,—the laborious diligence of the last century, when every man kept a diary, yields many facts, and more amusement; for where we cannot sympathize or laugh *with* their authors, we can always laugh *at* them.

There are not a few persons who like to know the purport of every composition in a few words, and who are fond of asking the actual readers of any book, “Well, what does it all amount to? What does the author profess to prove? You have read his disquisition, give us ‘the long and short of it’ in a word.” Contractions make cripples of books as well as of human beings, and the ill-natured part of the world make sport of

both. It will perhaps, therefore, be not surprising if such a lazy inquiry as the foregoing meets with something like the following answer, "Oh, he shows pretty clearly that our ancestors had long memories as well as long ears ; he says we should all worship and pray to our progenitors like the Chinese ; he asserts that intellect descends from sire to son, as regularly as a wide mouth or a hooked nose ; he tells us that a poet without a pedigree is an anomaly ; he proves how by an ascent of twenty generations, every body is related to every other body ; he says there are two hundred dormant peerages, crying out with the facetious little pigs in the nursery tale, ' Who'll eat me, who'll eat me ? ' he says that almost every one of the eighteen millions of our population is entitled to a peerage somehow or other, though I can scarcely tell you how he chops them up into so many pieces ; he professes to believe that any person whatever with diligence, can

prove himself to be 'founder's kin' to some fellowship or charitable endowment; he evidently thinks that *birth* 'makes the man, the want of it, the fellow.'"

If this essay has had many readers who would describe its arguments in such words, it has been written and perused in vain. Equally abortive must it be considered if so few pages as these need a serious summary. They must, assuredly, have seemed prolix, when they require to be epitomized in a peroration, or fabulous if they demand to be closed with "a moral."

THE END.



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